

Government Orders

• (2020)

In the United States, the rate of imprisonment is higher than anywhere else in the world. Despite the fact that, in 1990, they were spending more than \$70 billion on correctional, judicial and police services, they had the highest rates in the world for murder, robbery and rape. We must try to solve the crime problem through prevention rather than repression, yet the bill favours the latter.

The Reform Party wants even more repression as we can see from the amendments they are proposing. It wants to lower the minimum age for criminal responsibility to 10 and the maximum to 15. Reformers would like the identity of young offenders 14 and over to be made public, and in some cases even the identity of those between 10 and 13 years of age. They want the criminal records of young offenders to be kept and, finally, they want parents to be legally responsible for illegal acts committed by their children.

As a retired teacher who taught at the high school and college levels for 46 years, I can tell you that the violent and repressive methods proposed in these amendments to the Young Offenders Act are not the solution to the prevention of crime among young people. A zero tolerance policy towards violence in school often exacerbates violent behaviour rather than preventing it. Mediation and prevention programs against violence in schools would be more effective than expulsion and possible imprisonment of offenders.

In the twelfth report of the Standing Committee on Justice and the Solicitor General, it is mentioned that "—abused children are three times more likely than the rest of the population to become violent adults. Physically abused children are five times as likely to be violent as adults towards a family member".

We are all revolted by violence, and I mean violence among young people as well as adults. However, these past few years, the average number of people under 18 charged with homicide has been considerably lower than in the 1970s. According to national crime statistics, only a minority of young offenders are involved in crimes against violent crimes. In 1991, 70 per cent of all federal charges against young offenders involved crimes against property. The media are creating a climate of fear by reporting violent crimes in a spectacular manner, as if we were faced with an epidemic or the plague.

On June 9, 1994, the newspaper *Le Droit* reported that the chief coroner, Pierre Morin, said at a press conference in Hull that the suicide rate in Quebec was a disaster. In 1992, there were 1,246 suicides, around 100 of them involving young Quebecers. One of the main cause is often related to the stress suffered by young people during the judicial process.

• (2025)

Many researchers believe that economic conditions have an impact on crime levels. We have a striking example of that with the violence happening now in Russia where the crime rate has reached gigantic proportions during the present economic crisis. In the United States there is no real variation of the crime rate in the states waging the usual fight against crime.

Furthermore, in 1992, maximum sentences under the Young Offenders Act went from three to five years. We have no statistics to prove the effectiveness of such measures. Why not wait for the results?

For all these reasons I will vote against this bill which will do nothing to reduce the crime rate among young offenders. I support wholeheartedly the amendment submitted by the member of the Official Opposition for Saint-Hubert asking that this House refuse to proceed with the second reading of Bill C-37 which is based on a repressive principle.

[English]

Miss Deborah Grey (Beaver River): Madam Speaker, I rise tonight to address Bill C-37. I will say along with my caucus members that we will support this bill. I also must stress that I do so only for lack of a better alternative in this House.

This bill is a step in the right direction but it still falls short of the necessary changes that would alter the tragic course of youth crime today. I am pleasantly surprised that the Liberals have decided to tackle the issue of youth crime. Events over the last few months should have been a clear indication to this government that much more stringent amendments are called for, are in fact necessary.

The horrendous drive-by murder on Elgin Street in Ottawa and the death of a fellow House of Commons cousin across the river in Hull are two alarming examples of the state of criminal justice concerning youth in the capital region alone.

When thousands of Albertans gathered in Edmonton, the city that is closest to my home, on May 8 of this year to demand the overhaul of the Young Offenders Act, the government should have realized that the people want real change and not just cosmetic change.

The current justice minister's response to this alarming state of criminal justice in Canada has been: "I insist that we keep this issue in perspective and I repeat that the justice system on the whole is in very good shape".

Bill C-37 is a bill that was obviously tailored by this same minister. It has all the hallmarks of a government that believes the justice system is in good shape. It would not convince Edmontonians and the family of Barb Danelesko that the justice system is in good shape.